

SERBIA

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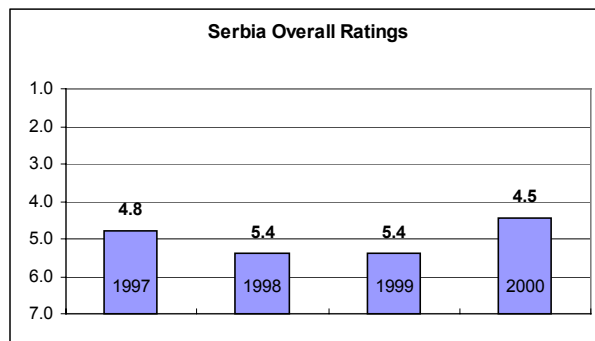
Capital: Belgrade
GDP per capita: n/a
Population: n/a

Inflation: n/a
Unemployment: n/a
Foreign Direct Investment: n/a

OVERALL DESCRIPTION: 4.5

During 2000 the position of NGOs in FRY passed through several different phases. After the NATO bombing, NGO activities increased in several fields, including humanitarian assistance, psychosocial services for displaced persons from Kosovo, and educational activities for displaced children. Parallel to that, activities of NGOs were focused on raising awareness of the need for free and democratic elections, as a non-violent means of changing power.

After the announcement of elections, NGOs entered a new phase, where activities were focused on organizing local and national campaigns. These efforts contributed to the highest voter turnout ever in Serbia and to the victory of democratic forces. These activities were carried out in especially difficult conditions due to the growing repression of the regime, including arrests and harassment of NGO activists, and the closing down of politically active NGOs. Contrary to the regime's aims, this repression served to strengthen the solidarity and networking of the sector and reduced fear from repression.



After the fall of Milosevic, NGOs are facing a new challenge – working with a friendly government, as opposed to working as an opposition force. There are many basic needs that the government cannot meet alone, ranging from education and health care to human rights and minority issues, where NGOs can play a valuable role.

There are around 2,000 NGOs registered on the Federal level, of which approximately 500 are estimated to be active. A large number of NGOs are active in the spheres of environment, education, arts and culture, and human rights. However, the sheer number of organizations does not correspond to the relative strength and activity of various groups. Some of the most influential NGOs are those working in the fields of civic education, economic development, and human rights.

LEGAL ENVIRONMENT: 5.0

Although there have not been any legislative changes over the past year, the environment in which NGOs in Serbia operate has changed dramatically. Growing repression against all individuals and groups acting in opposition to the regime marked the first part of the year –especially the pre-election period. Raids were carried out by the financial police, which resulted in the closing of many organizations. Other groups had their equipment and files taken from them, were subject to arrests, and faced other types of pressure. Although such harassment was aimed at preventing their activities, it did not succeed due to the strong solidarity among NGOs. Although the registration procedure is relatively simple, the Yugoslav Ministry of Justice and the Serbian Ministry of the Interior refused to register several organizations because of their programs. As a result of these conditions, NGOs were essentially only able to work in cities controlled by the opposition before October 5th.

Since the 5th of October, however, the repressive tactics of the government have stopped, even though the old laws remain in place. The new government has pledged to make NGO legal reform one of their top priorities.

With the exception of grant funds, NGOs do not receive any tax exemptions. There are also no tax deductions for people who support NGOs.

NGOs are allowed to earn income, as there are no laws specifically preventing this. As most NGOs were considered enemies of the state until recently, there have not been any public and transparent competitions for governmental funds. However, some NGOs do get budget funds.

There is a network of lawyers who provide legal advice and assistance to NGOs.

ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY: 4.5

Leading NGOs tend to have paid staff, as well as a clearly defined management structure. In smaller, local NGOs, there are still core groups of enthusiasts who do a bit of everything.

There are several organizations that assist NGOs with recruiting volunteers. However, the economic situation in Serbia is still so dire that it is hard to expect people to volunteer when they face daily problems of survival. At the same time, there is a wave of young people who are interested in working with NGOs as semi-volunteers, for the opportunities this affords to learn, gain experiences, meet people, travel, and earn a modest income.

NGOs still do not have wide constituencies – their activities are mostly based on the individual or group efforts, although this is beginning to change.

Until recently, the conditions in which NGOs worked really prevented the formulation of long-term strategies. Nevertheless, measures were taken to overcome all possible obstacles that the previous regime imposed. For example, when the state closed CESID, it did not prevent them from doing their work on the night of elections in the premises of other NGOs. However, many NGOs have undergone training on strategic

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planning, and the new conditions in the country should allow them to implement what they learned.

Approximately 35% of NGOs are equipped with computers and modems, but this is only the case when funders cover the cost of equipment, which is often not the case. Despite this basic level of equipment, electricity restrictions prevent them from fully utilizing this equipment.

FINANCIAL VIABILITY: 6.0

Due to the difficult economic situation, it is virtually impossible for NGOs to secure financial support locally. However, some NGOs are successful in securing in-kind support, both in the form of volunteers and other goods.

Well-established NGOs often have diversified sources of funding, while smaller groups still depend on one or two donors. Although there is a significant amount of donor funding available for Serbian NGOs, until recently, very few donors have had offices or representatives in country. As a result, it has been difficult for organizations to cultivate relationships with donors. Most NGOs need additional funding to remain viable for the short-term future. This problem is especially

acute for those groups that do not focus on foreign donors' priority areas.

Few organizations have financial management systems, but as a new NGO law is put into place, this situation is likely to improve.

NGOs do not generally earn income from their services or products, as beneficiaries cannot afford to pay. Government and local businesses do not contract NGOs for services, although NGOs do provide services that government is unable to. NGOs usually do not have assets that could be a source of income. Unions and other membership organizations do collect dues, but this amount of money does not represent a significant portion of their funding.

ADVOCACY: 4.0

In terms of advocacy, the situation before and after October 5th is also significantly different. Before October 5th, the only examples of cooperation between NGOs and government were on the local level, mostly in "free towns" run by the democratic opposition. On the Republic and Federal level, the only true example of advocacy by NGOs was their critical role in ensuring the active participation of citizens in the presidential elections.

Over the past few months, the situation has changed. Due to their role in the elections, several NGOs are seen as critical partners to political parties and the government, and are regularly consulted about various issues. Furthermore, many NGO leaders and members are becoming part of the federal and republican governmental structures. For example, the Deputy President of the federal government, head of the central bank, and future Serbian Minister of Interior all have NGO backgrounds. The influence of

NGOs on governmental policy at all levels is expected to increase as the new government consolidates power.

As their influence with the government increases, NGOs will need to develop new skills. As there is little experience in lobbying and advocacy, new training programs will need to be put into place to teach people how to work in cooperation with the government, rather than in opposition to it.

NGOs are very interested in reforming the legal environment under which NGOs operate, as this is necessary to enable them to function as legal entities with full accountability and transparency. A draft law is currently being prepared and will be proposed to the new government in the nearest future. The government has also pledged to make NGO legal reform one of its top priorities.

SERVICE PROVISION: 4.0

Given the poor economic situation in the country and the state's inability to meet people's basic needs, there is high demand for service provision by local NGOs. While they are not able to meet all of these demands, Serbian NGOs do provide a diverse range of services at a high quality. NGOs work in the fields of education, social protection, psychosocial support, human rights, environment, and humanitarian assistance. Services provided generally respond to the needs of various disadvantaged populations, including refugees, displaced children, single mothers, and disabled persons.

Although there is great demand for the services provided, beneficiaries

can not generally afford to pay for them. Therefore, services are generally provided free of charge, with the costs borne by foreign donors or through volunteers.

Given the political situation in the country before October, the government has not generally recognized NGOs as possible partners in providing basic social services. While some local governments have provided in-kind support to a few organizations, none have run competitions or provided grants to NGOs. NGOs are optimistic that they will be able to more actively provide services and to develop more cooperative relationships with local governments in the future.

INFRASTRUCTURE: 4.0

There are two NGO resource centers located in Belgrade, as well as several information centers on the local level that disseminate information among NGOs. Civic Initiative's Resource Center provides training, access to e-mail, and technical assistance, and also publishes a monthly bulletin for NGOs and translates books, projects and other materials. All of the services are provided free of charge. The resource center run by the Center for the Devel-

opment of the Non-Profit Sector (CRNPS) has a database and provides legal support for NGOs trying to register.

There are a few organizations re-granting international donor funds, including G17+, Civic Initiatives, CRNPS, and the European Movement in Serbia. There is also cooperation between local NGOs and foreign

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funderson grant assessment procedures.

There are several networks that disseminate information among NGOs via email and newsletters, including those run by Group 484, CRNPS, and Civic Initiatives. There have also been several big conferences of NGOs, which facilitate networking.

Basic and advanced training is provided by a local group of trainers – Team Tri – that is part of Civic Initiatives. To date, they have trained almost 1000 NGO representatives, and there is a waiting list of over 300 people. All the materials

delivered to participants are translated into Serbian and adapted to the local situation, but there are still insufficient sources of information available in Serbian.

Although rare, there are occasional examples of inter-sectoral partnerships on the local level. For example in Kikinda and Vrsac, joint projects between local authorities and NGOs have helped develop small and medium enterprises. The trade union Nezavisnost also cooperated closely with local media in the pre-election campaign.

PUBLIC IMAGE: 4.0

Before October, NGOs in Serbia received very different treatment by the official and independent media. Only the independent media presented a positive picture of the sector. Since October, media have made strides in learning about NGOs and covering their activities. However, much work remains to be done to educate journalists about the role of NGOs in civil society.

Although the role of NGOs in society is still not well understood by the general population, NGOs do have a fairly positive image, especially after the NATO bombing, due to the programs and services that they have developed. As a result, the general public understands that NGOs are working for the common good.

The Milosevic government, of course, had a negative perception of NGOs.

Local government tended to be more cooperative, especially in “free cities”. Fortunately, already there are positive signs of a different approach by the new governments at all levels. While there is some progress within NGO-government relations, ties have not yet been developed with the business sector.

NGOs have a difficult time publicizing their activities for many reasons. There is still a lack of interest in the media, journalists lack knowledge of the sector, NGO representatives do not have sufficient skills in public relations and promotion, and there is a lack of funding for promotional activities. While these problems still exist, the electoral campaign made significant strides to improve the public image of NGOs and relations with the media.